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ABSTRACT

Several strategies for improving communication between parents and teachers are explored in this handbook. Section I provides background information on parent-teacher communication. Recommendations to teachers for enhancing parent involvement in education are provided. Section II describes communication strategies for use in parent-teacher conferences. Types of communication, home-school communications assessment, and oral and written communications are covered. Section III deals extensively with conferences involving parents and teachers in terms of types of parent-teacher conferences, role playing situations, the process of dealing with problematic situations, and the processes of preparing, conducting, following up, and evaluating the conference. Examples of notes, telephone contacts, letters, and meetings are included. Appendices provide suggestions for ways to reach the hard-to-reach parent, references, a bibliography, and lists of materials available from the Home and School Institute and the National Committee for Citizens in Education. (RH)

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PARENT PARTICIPATION FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

"Parent-Teacher Communication"

A Handbook for Teachers and Parents

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PARENT PARTICIPATION FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

"Parent-Teacher Communication"

Introduction

Good communication between parents and teachers will contribute to the child's learning. Unfortunately, some parents, as a result of their unpleasant experiences in school, are very apprehensive about talking with teachers. In turn, teachers may be uncertain and uncomfortable in their contacts with parents. Strategies are needed to help break down these communication barriers so that parents and teachers can form a partnership in the education of the child.

Several strategies for improving communication between parents and teachers are explored in this handbook. Examples of notes, telephone contacts, letters, and meetings are included. Parent-teacher conferences comprise a major section.

This handbook is one part of the "Parent Participation for Effective Schools Program" developed by the Arizona Department of Education. Two additional handbooks, distributed during seminars on Parent Participation, are How to Help Your Child Learn (for parents) and Planning for Parent Involvement (for administrators, teachers, and parent advisory groups).

For information about the handbooks and/or seminars, contact:

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SECTION I

Background Information

on

Parent-Teacher

Communication

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION

Good teachers have long recognized the importance of parental communication and involvement in student achievement. It has been only in recent years, however, that a body of research has developed that supports parent involvement in their children's education. As Anne Henderson states, ". . .the evidence is beyond dispute: parent involvement improves student achievement." (Henderson, 1987)

An important aspect of parent involvement is communication between the home and the school. In fact, it is the foundation for all other forms of parent involvement.

How Much Communication Do Parents Receive from Teachers?

According to a Maryland study, some parents receive few communications from teachers. About 60 percent said they had never spoken to the teacher on the phone, 59 percent had never attended a workshop at the school, 36 percent had not had a conference with the teacher or received a handwritten note from the teacher.

Parents (58 percent) also reported that they rarely or never received requests from the teacher to become involved in learning activities at home. "Fewer than 30 percent of the parents reported that teachers gave them many ideas of how to help their child in reading and math." (Epstein, 1986)

How Did Parents Feel About Teachers Who Involved Them in Their Child's School?

Joyce Epstein found that parent whose children's teachers were leaders in parent involvement were significantly more likely to report that they:

- recognized the teacher worked hard to interest parents,
- understood more than in the previous year about what their child was being taught,
- were more positive about the teacher's interpersonal skills, and
- rated the teacher higher in overall teacher ability.

"Thus, teachers who worked at parent involvement were considered better teachers than those who remained more isolated from the families of the children they taught". (Epstein, 1983)

What Influences Teachers' Use of Parent Involvement?

The factors which most strongly influence the teacher's use of parent involvement practices are:

1. Grade level taught (lower elementary grades reported more involvement).
2. Amount of existing parent involvement.
3. Teacher commitment of time and energy to parent involvement.

Teachers who are leaders in parent involvement encourage participation by all parents regardless of the parents' level of education. They also make equal demands on single and married parents to help at home, and rated single and married parents as equally helpful and responsible in learning activities. (Epstein, 1985)

Does Parent Involvement Make a Difference in Student Achievement?

"The evidence is consistent that parents' encouragement, activities and interest at home, and their participation in schools and classrooms affect their children's achievement, even after the students' ability and family socioeconomic status is taken into account. Students gain an edge in personal and academic development if their families place an emphasis on schooling, let their children know they do, and do so continually over the school years." (Epstein, 1985)

Teachers who were leaders in parent involvement had students who made greater gains in reading achievement from spring to fall of their school year than did other students. A study of 613 fifth graders found that when parents are involved the students reported having:

- more positive attitudes toward school,
- more regular homework habits,
- more similarity between the school and family,
- more familiarity between the teacher and the family, and
- more homework assigned on the weekends. (Epstein, 1985)

How Much Do Parents Help Their Children With Learning Activities at Home?

"Only eight percent of the parents reported they never helped their child with reading and math skills. Over 85 percent of the parents spent 15 minutes or more helping their children on homework activities when asked to do so by the teacher. Most parents reported they could help more if the teacher showed them what to do." (Epstein, 1986)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHERS FOR ENHANCING PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

1. Teachers need to try new ways of working with parents. They need to be aware of parents' interest in both traditional and decision-making forms of parent involvement.

2. Teachers need to understand that parent involvement is developmental—that is, when parents are involved in certain roles greater skill and effort is needed on the part of both parents and teachers.

3. Teachers, parents and principals need to work together to develop a clear statement about the goals of parent involvement in their school. The statement needs to indicate that parents are equally as important to children's academic success as educators.

4. Teachers need to find out how parents want to be involved in their children's education at school and at home. Parents have a wide range of interests and abilities, and may be able to be more involved than previously thought. A variety of opportunities should be available for parent involvement in the classroom and at home.

5. Teachers need to participate in preservice and in-service activities which will help them develop better partnerships with parents. By modeling effective ways of working with parents, experienced teachers can assist new teachers in implementing parent involvement efforts.

6. Teachers should advocate for formal, written school policies encouraging parent involvement.

7. Teachers need to provide parents with ideas about things to help children learn at home and/or to do homework.

8. Teachers should help children understand how important it is for parents and teachers to work as partners in their education.

9. Teachers, parents and principals should work together to overcome the barriers to open communication between parents and the school staff.

10. Teachers can help ensure increased parent involvement by giving them more information, providing more opportunities to share their concerns/insights, and urging more parent training and partnership roles. (Chaukin, 1985)

SECTION II

Strategies for Parent-Teacher Communication

STRATEGIES FOR PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION

Types of Communication

There is a renewed emphasis today on what many parents and teachers have always known -- parents and teachers must work together if the child is to reach his/her full potential. The first step toward this partnership is effective home-school communications. Some parents will develop their own communications, without any special help from the school. For the average parent, however, an organized program is needed.

Two types of communication efforts are needed:

1. individual student's needs and progress, such as academic progress, attendance, homework assignments, classroom conduct, special needs, progress toward graduation, career and postsecondary planning, interest, and motivation.

2. overall school program, activities, accomplishments, such as time for parent-teacher conferences, PTA-PTO meetings, curriculum emphasis, discipline code, standards for grading, attendance policies, special events and programs, special situations.

Home-School Communications Assessment

Parent-teacher communications can begin by finding out through a brief interview how parents feel about the communications they are now receiving. Parent volunteers could conduct the interviews by asking the following questions:

1. What communications do you now receive from the school?
2. Do you receive communication as often as you would like?
3. What else would you like the school to communicate?

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4. How can the school's existing communications be made more effective?

(Purnell, 1985)

Administrators and teachers will find it useful to analyze their existing communication channels with parents through use of a chart such as shown on the next page.

HOW DO YOU COMMUNICATE WITH PARENTS?

Audience: Parents

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Place an "x" in the box under each communication channel you use to inform parents on the topics listed at the left.

	Students	Local Newspapers	School Building Publications	School District Publications	Adults/ Friends/ Neighbors	Organizations PTA, Lions, Scouts	Parent Conferences	Report Cards
Curriculum								
Child's Progress								
School Finance								
Meetings, Programs								
Teachers/ Methods								
School Policies								

1. What channels do you use most frequently?
2. Are there some channels underused or omitted?
3. Are there channels not listed that you use or would like to use? (Please list)
4. What channels seem to be most effective?

   Least effective?
5. What changes and/or improvements would you like to see in your school's communication with parents?

(Adapted from Banach, 1982)

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Evaluating Your Communications

School personnel may wish to evaluate the communications they are now using. On the following pages are two worksheets for evaluating the school's face-to-face or oral communications and written communications.

When completing these worksheets, it is important to solicit parent input. This can be done by using a technique employed by businesses called "focus groups." A representative group of customers (parents) are invited to come and share their views. Parents active in the parent committee are another important group to have involved in completing these worksheets. Communication is singled out for special assessment because good communications are an essential foundation for all the other activities.

(Chrispeels, 1985)

COMMUNICATIONS CHECKLIST

Directions: This worksheet is designed to help you evaluate face-to-face communications with parents. In each square (if appropriate to that item) put a "+" for above average, a "0" for average, or "-" for below average. This quick check method will help you see strengths and areas in need of improvement.

FACE-TO-FACE/ORAL COMMUNICATION	Early Publicity	Multiple Methods of Notification	Adequate Preparation	Clear Purpose for Meetings or Contact	Agenda or Questions to Aid Preparation	Important Information	Helpful to Parents	Childcare Provided	Attendance Goal	Focus on Child
Classroom Orientations										
Back-to-School Nights										
Open Houses										
Parent Education Meetings										
Parent-Teacher Conferences										
Telephone Conferences										
Meetings with the Principal										
Coffee Klatches										
Home Visits										
Community Breakfasts										
Potluck Suppers										
Special Events										
Presentation to Community Groups										
Other:										

(Adapted from Chrispeels, 1985)

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COMMUNICATIONS CHECKLIST

This worksheet is designed to help you evaluate your school's written communication. In each square (if appropriate to that item) put a "+" for above average, a "0" for average, or "-" for below average. This quick check method will help you see strengths and areas for improvement.

WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS	Frequent	Easy to Read	Neat and Attractive	Encourages Responses	Important Information	Focus on Academics	Timely Distribution	Adequate Distribution	
Letters Home									
School Policies									
- discipline code									
- homework policy									
- health regulations									
- absences/tardies									
Course Requirements									
Meeting Notices									
Progress Notes									
Success Reports									
School Newsletters									
Class Newsletters									
Student Homework									
Classwork									
Parent Surveys									
Learning Objectives									
Assignment or Activity Calendars									
Handbooks									
Classroom Policies									

(Adapted from Chrispeels, 1985)

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ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

Communicating Through Meetings and Meals

Continental Breakfast

Fathers are invited to come to school for a continental breakfast with their children and spend the morning in observation and discussion. Their children take them on guided tours of their school.

This provides the opportunity for fathers to hear from the teachers of their own children regarding the year's goals, methods, and schedules. They visit classes where they can see firsthand what their children are doing at that time.

Good Grades Continental Breakfasts

At the end of each six-week grading period, the school hosts continental breakfasts for students who make all A's and B's on their report cards, and we invite their parents as well. Held before school, these breakfasts feature tasty homemade rolls and coffee cakes. The regularly scheduled gatherings give teachers a chance to mingle informally with parents and talk about the fine schoolwork kids are doing.

Honor Roll Pancake-and-Sausage Breakfasts

At the end of each semester, students who make the honor roll are invited--again, with their parents--to a pancake-and-sausage breakfast prepared especially for them by teachers and administrators. The breakfasts are held before the start of the school day and include a formal welcome (and plenty of praise) from the school principal. These are smaller get-togethers than the continental breakfasts, allowing parents and school people to talk in greater depth.

Parent Advisory Brunches

Meetings of the Parent Advisory Committee now are brunches held in a school dining room. The room's informal setting allows for plenty of give-and-take among the superintendent, board members, principal, counselor, and committee members who attend.

Lunches for Parents of Upcoming Freshmen

Each spring, the parents of eighth graders are invited to a luncheon where they receive freshmen registration information, tour the high school, and discuss what high school life will be like for their kids. Lunch is in the high school cafeteria, and the principal and guidance counselor answer questions as part of the parent orientation process. Approaching high school is a time of trepidation for parents as well as for students. It is helpful for parents to get a sense of what will occur in the years ahead, find that other parents have many of the same feelings, and meet and be reassured by members of the high school staff.

National Honor Society Induction Luncheons

Induction into the National Honor Society is a high and important honor for top high school students. Give it more of the pomp and circumstance it deserves by holding the induction ceremony on a school day and following it with a luncheon for students and parents.

Lunch with the Principal is one proven way of having two-way communication with parents. Twice monthly send out invitations to parents to join the principal for lunch in the school cafeteria. Encourage them to bring a neighbor. The conversation should be informal with opportunities to talk openly and frankly with one another.

Potluck Luncheon with the Teacher. Teachers invite their students' parents to a noon potluck luncheon in the classroom. In an informal way, the teacher shares the current activities of the classroom. The informality will help the parents feel more comfortable in coming to school.

Evening Sessions

Parents are invited to attend an evening session where they act as students during three 45-minute sessions in curriculum areas such as reading, math, science, social studies, music, etc. The objective of this meeting is to give insights in new methods, materials, and goals. Courses are taught by teachers from the school.

Grade-Level Sessions

An effective method of communicating with parents might be developed by dividing large-group parent meetings into grade-level sessions. At these meetings, classroom teachers could relate the expectations of the year's work, familiarize parents with textbooks, and show the schedule of a typical day. This might prove a good time to acquaint parents with educational terms. "Jargon" such as computer-assisted instruction, learning centers, or behavior modification could leave parents perplexed to the extent of consulting dictionaries for clarification. Some teachers have used grade-level meetings to actually give lessons to parents--the same lessons the children were getting in the classroom. This way, parents experience for themselves the kind of instruction the child encounters.

Open Houses

Open house draws in elementary parents a little more readily, but works at the secondary level as well. Open house works best if (a) held perhaps once a year, (b) at a time of low schedule conflict, and (c) with much advance planning, preparation, and publicity (the three P's).

Parents at both elementary and secondary levels are more likely to attend open house if:

- their child is featured in some way;
- there will be an opportunity to examine student work and talk with teachers;
- the time is convenient;
- notice is given far in advance;
- they receive a personal welcome or invitation;
- they expect to experience a cordial atmosphere, including refreshments;

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- o the open house has a stated purpose the parents consider personally important; and
- o they have been involved in the planning.

Back-to-School Night Entertainment

Although visiting children's classrooms and meeting teachers is the heart of back-to-school night, consider "jazzing" up the occasion. A meal or a covered-dish supper could be served ahead of time, and provide entertainment by students. This way, dinner is taken care of, parents can watch their children perform--and they are in school learning what goes on there.

Fine Arts Banquets

This is a twist on the usual type of school banquet: Not only are awards presented, but entertainment also is provided. Once a year, the high school's fine arts department plans a banquet involving each fine arts group. The band plays at different times throughout the evening; before dinner, parents and students mingle and look at art displays; after dinner, the drama club performs a short skit. The evening concludes with the presentation of fine arts awards for the year.

Neighborhood Coffees

Parents are encouraged to organize up to 12 people for an informal discussion about school during a neighborhood coffee party. Two staff members attend the coffee party and explain the programs, goals, materials, and methods.

Project Coffee Cup

The price of coffee is a factor now, but tea or other beverages can serve just as well. Here's how it works: Design a small coupon (about the usual-sized coupon) and print on colorful book stock. The message will run along these lines: "Good for one cup of coffee at ___(name)___ School on ___(date)___ between ___(time)___ with members of our staff. No R.S.V.P. needed, but hope you can join us over a cup of coffee." Do it while school is in session.

(Alabama Community Education, 1984; Carney, 1984; Maurer, 1985; Woodman, 1978.)

Parents Attend School

If your parents want to find out what schools are really like today, why not have them attend a day of classes? That is why the administrators at Ralston (Neb.) High School offered their students a deal: a free day off if they could get one of their parents to attend classes in their place. "We had confidence that if parents could see what really happens in a typical day at Ralston High, they'd be proud and pleased," said principal Lon Bernth.

Thirty parents took the challenge and not one reported a negative experience. More than half returned questionnaires seeking their opinions on "Switch Day" and of those, two-thirds rated the day "excellent" and the others thought it was "very good."

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Typical comments focused on increased understanding of what their youngsters experience at school. "I could see the pressures, not only of academic work but from the busy, highly-charged atmosphere," said one parent. Others commented on the difficulty of the academic work compared with the "good old days" when they attended high school. "Much of the work was on what I consider to be a college level," another parent commented.

The staff and the students who went to school that day got caught up in the atmosphere as well. In fact, several parents seemed pleasantly surprised at the level of courtesy and helpfulness in the high school. This, remember, runs counter to the often-spoken notion that schools do not stress discipline and the amenities the way they used to. One parent's comment summed up the general feeling. "I loved it! Let's make this an annual event."

("Here's Another Switch", n.d.)

The Greatest Communication Vehicle

Perhaps the greatest vehicle for transmitting information about the school is the child. Every teacher is encouraged to spend five to ten minutes at the end of the day summarizing the day's activities and stressing new understandings and insights.

Communicating by Telephone

Teachers and the Telephone--That Good Message

When was the last time that a teacher or principal in your school district telephoned a parent about his/her child . . . to compliment or to express concern and friendly interest? Most often, telephone calls from a school to a home bring bad news . . . a child was tardy, expected work has not been completed, Johnnie was involved in a fight on the way home yesterday afternoon, or we need your help at the school carnival.

Imagine how you would feel as a parent if you are contacted by a teacher or the school principal and told that your son/daughter is doing well in school . . . that the child has overcome a learning or behavioral problem that he/she had been experiencing. Be prepared for a response indicating shock or surprise. Parents are not accustomed to hearing good things about their children over the telephone.

How-to-Do-It

- Make every effort to gain the cooperation of the teachers' association, building principals, and others who might be making calls.
- Prepare a statement of guidelines including the cooperative objectives established by school district administration and teachers.
- Provide a proper facility. If a teacher must stand up at the secretary's desk or ask the principal to leave his office in order to use the telephone, it will be difficult for the program to succeed.

- Provide a reporting system. Maintaining a log of positive calls will give you a check on the effectiveness of the program.

What Will It Cost?

GENERALLY, YOU CANNOT EXPECT STAFF TO MAKE CALLS IF THE TIME IS NOT MADE AVAILABLE. For counselors, principals, and those without regular classroom teaching responsibility, a little time can be taken from the regular daily schedule. Planning periods are now provided by many school districts for all teachers. The positive telephone call program could be carried on during teacher preparation time.

Additional telephone lines may need to be installed to handle the increased loads and at the same time make lines available for regular school business. Your telephone company will be happy to assist you in determining the present loads and the possible need for additional lines or extensions.

There May Be Pitfalls

Imposing demands on teachers by administrative decree will not make the positive telephone program work. The program must be a joint effort with the participants being involved in planning the program in order to obtain commitment. Teachers will not feel free to make such telephone calls if some measure of privacy is not available. The physical setting must be appropriate.

(Roberts, n.d.)

Telephone Tell-a-Parent

Another version of the previous idea was used in Lincoln, Nebraska. All teachers who agreed to make at least one happy phone call each week were asked to return a "Count Me In" card to the office. In less than two months, 251 cards were returned out of 1,500--including at least one from all secondary schools and all but six of the 32 elementary schools.

(Doss, 1978)

Parent Call-In

A published schedule is set up whereby parents may discuss questions on the telephone with teachers, specialists, and administrators. This appeals to those parents who for one reason or another find it difficult to visit school.

SCRIPT OUTLINE FOR INITIAL PARENT CONTACT

1. IDENTIFY YOURSELF -- BE A PERSON NOT A TITLE

   . . . This is (your name) . . . from _____ School.

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2. POSITIVE REASON FOR CALLING

. . . I am a (subject or grade) teacher at the school and I called tonight to tell you that I am looking forward to working with (first name - student) this year.

3. ASSERT POSITIVE FEELING ABOUT THE PROGRAM

. . . We really feel we have a good program and excellent instruction to offer (first name - student) at this school.

4. BE POSITIVE ABOUT BEING ABLE TO HELP THE STUDENT

. . . All of our programs and instruction are designed so (first name - student) can gain as much education as possible for him . . . .

5. BRING PARENTAL OWNERSHIP INTO VIEW

. . . We also are looking forward to meeting you and discussing some things that you can do with (first name - student) at home to help him get the most out of his education experiences--we also will be sending you some information about this. . . .

6. GET PARENTS TO COME TO THE SCHOOL

. . . I also want to encourage you to attend our monthly P.T.A. meeting which is held the (day of week) of every month. The next meeting is (date, time, place), so please mark it on your calendar. I'll be there and am looking forward to meeting you.

7. SELL THE MEETING

. . . The meetings are a good chance to meet the people who work daily with (first name - student) and also a time to discuss some information on important issues you wish to share about the school. Generally we also present some information that other parents have found valuable in working with their children who attend our school . . .

8. REINFORCE INFORMATION

. . . Again my name is (your name) and I look forward to meeting you . . . .

9. BE A PERSONAL CONTACT AT THE SCHOOL

. . . If there is anything I can do for you please give me a call at the school and I'll be glad to arrange for some time for us . . . .

10. CLOSE -- FRIENDLY

. . . Thank you for your time--Good evening . . . .

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ROLE-PLAY SITUATIONS

The following role-plays are designed to give the participants experience in handling both positive and negative telephone calls between parents and teachers. It is suggested that the players "try on" a role other than the one they usually play. At the end of the conversation the observer should comment on the conversation, identifying what seemed to work well, and what improvements were needed.

PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION: TELEPHONE

Directions: There should be three people in each group. One person assumes the role of the parent, another that of teacher and the third is the observer. The observer should give feedback at the end of each role play on what worked well, how their responses might be improved and other suggestions. Do as many role plays as time allows, rotating role of parent, teacher and observer.

Situation No. 1:

Teacher: Calls the parent to introduce himself/herself at the first of the school year. Briefly comments on what the child will be studying. Invites the parent to visit the school. Ask if the parent has any questions.

Parent: New to the community, the first time the child has been in school in this community, quite concerned how well the child will be accepted. Feels schools in the former community were excellent; not sure how good they are here.

Situation No. 2:

Teacher: Calls the parent because the child has become quite disruptive in the classroom—talks to other children during study times, will not stay in seat, is disrespectful, rude to the teacher.

Parent: Finds child's behavior difficult to believe, rarely has difficulty with child at home, willing to help teacher with child.

Situation No. 3:

Teacher: Calls the parent to inform him/her that the child has had all the spelling words correct for three weeks in a row. The child is a third grader, and had been doing only average work until this happened.

Parent: Thanks the teacher for the information. Suggests some reasons why the child's work has improved.

Situation No. 4:

Teacher: Calls the parent because of the poor work the child has been doing in spelling. The child has missed nearly all the words the past four weeks. Requests the parent help the child with his/her spelling.

Parent: Not overly concerned about the situation. States he/she was a poor speller, too. Reluctantly agrees to help the child.

Situation No. 5:

Teacher: Calls parent to inform him/her that the child, a first grader, is progressing very well in learning to read. Suggests some things the parent might do to reinforce the child's progress.

Parent: Pleased with the information. Indicates the parent had read to the child since he/she was a baby. Continues to encourage reading in other ways.

Situation No. 6:

Teacher: Calls parent to inform him/her that the child is not progressing in reading. Unless the child shows considerable improvement during the next grading period, the teacher will consider retention. Requests the parent come in for a conference.

Parent: Refuses to believe what the teacher is saying. Indicates the child is very bright. The problem must be with the teacher's methods.

Situation No. 7:

Teacher: Calls parent to let him/her know that the child has been selected "Student of the Month" in the classroom which is based on behavior, attendance, and ability to get along with other students.

Parent: Is very pleased with the news, also very surprised.

Situation No. 8:

Teacher: Calls parent to let him/her know that the child has been tardy several times in the past 3-4 weeks, and absent nearly ten days. Wondering if the parent was aware of the situation. Explains the importance of regular attendance.

Parent: Unaware of the child's tardiness. Explains the child has been ill. Promises to see the child attends regularly, on time.

Situation No. 9:

Teacher: Calls to inform parent that student (in junior high) is doing exceptionally well in mathematics, and suggests that advanced algebra courses be considered for the coming year.

Parent: Pleased with the information. Would like more information about the course.

Situation No. 10:

Teacher: Calls to inform parent that student (in junior high) is failing several subjects and may not be able to graduate with his/her class from eighth grade.

Parent: Rather indifferent; indicates that education is unnecessary and not important to their family.

Situation No. 11:

Teacher: Calls the parent to inform him/her that the child has been selected to be on the school's team for the Academic Decathlon. The student is an eleventh grader and has a low "B" average. The Academic Decathlon will require additional study and class sessions. The parents' help will be needed to provide encouragement and support.

Parent: Feels the student could do much better work, and hopes this will help improve his/her grades. He/She is willing to help, but is concerned about the extra time it may take away from regular classroom work.

Situation No. 12:

Teacher: Calls the parent because the student, a junior, is failing in English during the third grading period. The course is needed for graduation.

Parent: Becomes quite upset upon receiving this information. States they can not do anything with the child any more. Asks what the teacher thinks they should do.

WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Personalized Communications

Letter to Parents

During the early days of the school term (and when a new student enrolls), send home a letter with each child. This should be the "door opener" to continuous flow of communication between the teacher and the parent. Suggested inclusions for the letter are:

1. A sincere welcome to the child (and parent).
2. A list of basic subjects and your plans for the year's studies.
3. The materials the child will need and how to properly label them for identification purposes.
4. An invitation to visit the class.
5. Your home number (if you really want an open relationship). The school number (with the best time you can be reached).
6. Invite the parents to share their concerns with you to encourage a team approach to educating the child.
7. Invite the parents to share talents, hobbies, or interest with the children (and you).
8. Tips to assist parents in helping their child at home.

(Guidelines for Improving Parent-Teacher Conferences, n.d.)

When the Child Is Having Difficulty

Personalized communications about individual children need to be initiated by school personnel rather than parents because parents seldom know whether a child is having difficulty or needs additional help. The teacher usually spots this first.

Teachers find it easier to initiate communications about student difficulties if there are policies or guidelines that lead parents, teachers, and students to expect such communications. Policies or guidelines of this type need to be developed by a school system committee, and should be officially adopted by school board action.

Based on previous studies of exemplary practices in local school systems, we recommend that the following personalized communications and follow-up practices be considered:

- Parents should be notified of any student academic difficulty approximately midway through a grading period. This allows time for improvement before the grade appears on a report card. Parents need guidance on how to follow up on academic deficiency reports.

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- Parents should be contacted about most student conduct problems that are serious enough to require even mild disciplinary action. Communicating promptly prevents further incidents. Research studies indicate parents want to be notified. Parents of secondary school students are especially keen about receiving prompt notification. Teachers and counselors more often risk being wrong in the judgment of parents when they fail to notify parents than they do when they communicate about behavior problems. Clearly, it is easier to do this when reporting is an expected procedure. Exceptions to this rule of course should be allowed under special circumstances, such as when a further-strained parent-child relationship might offset the benefits.

- Prompt and regular notification of student absence is best accomplished by a telephone message whenever possible. Policy in this area should encourage parents to call the school first whenever they know the student will be absent.

- Many parents indicate their willingness to review and acknowledge by signature their child's school work. This arrangement works well when the flow of communications is fully predictable, as when it is understood that this will be a daily and weekly transaction. These arrangements are best made by agreement between teacher and parent for a specified length of time.

- If parents are to be asked to help with or supervise completion of homework, this must be clearly communicated. In this event, parents should be offered instruction and support before they undertake this assignment. Parents and teachers will need to confer from time to time, with each other and the student, about the process. By following this pattern, more predictable results will be achieved when homework is assigned.

(Gotts, 1984)

The following article by Madeline Hunter, Adjunct Lecturer, School of Education University of California, Los Angeles, provides excellent examples of how to write difficult letters to parents.

"Making Parents Collaborators"

Writing a letter to the parents of a child who is having disciplinary problems can be one of the most distasteful tasks a principal or teacher faces. Beyond the fact that no one wants to be the bearer of unwelcome tidings, there is strong potential here for turning parents into adversaries at a time when we crucially need them as collaborators.

Children are parents' most vulnerable spot. When their child misbehaves or is failing to make appropriate progress, parents have a way of assuming (often incorrectly) that they are to blame. Thus any indication of failure on the part of the student may well be interpreted by parents as their own failure.

Obviously, parents want to believe in and support their children. So when students deny guilt or disclaim responsibility, parents are prone to accept what they say. Moreover, when the school sends home word that Jim is not finishing his work, Jim will very probably attempt to convince his parents that the problem lies in the impossibility of the assignment or the lack of adequate time--not in Jim's failure to exert the necessary effort.

When Mary influences other girls in an undesirable way, Mary will argue that she is not responsible for how other students behave, and mother will not be hard to convince.

When Ralph gets into trouble on the bus, he has an ironclad alibi--the other kids shoved him into the bus driver and he got all the blame.

Believing one's own child is a natural, not to mention desirable, trait; and youngsters are not above capitalizing on such faith to try to drive a wedge between school and home so as not to be confronted by an alliance of those two powerful forces when they have done something out of line.

The successful principal seeks to avoid this schism between home and school by doing everything possible to resolve the issue before bringing it to the parents' attention. If the effort is successful the principal is then in a position to send a message the parents will welcome--one complementing the student's achievement.

Sometimes, however, the effort fails, and it becomes the school's responsibility to notify parents of an unproductive situation and to seek to enlist their support. If this communication is to result in a relationship that is collaborative rather than adversarial, it must contain four important messages: "S/he can, but doesn't. You care, let's plan."

"S/he can"

We would not expect students to accomplish something unless we had evidence that they were capable of doing so. (We would not expect a cerebral palsied student to complete a writing assignment in record speed.) Parents must receive such evidence of ability. Otherwise, they may very well draw the conclusion that the school believes their child lacks the ability to do what is expected of "normal" students, an unpleasant proposition to any parent.

"But doesn't."

Parents also need to receive this evidence in language that deals with specific student behavior, not labels ("lazy," "deceitful," "irresponsible," "disrespectful," and the like). Principals need to communicate what students do or do not do; not what they supposedly are. Whenever possible the message should dignify the student's behavior by stating that we understand how it could happen. "He was having so much fun with his friends. . . ." "We are puzzled by. . . ." In any case, such labels as "unmotivated," "immature," "rude," and the like are to be strictly avoided, along with that often pejorative word "problem." These are "red flag" words that arouse parent's resistance. "My child certainly is not!" the parent instinctively declares.

"You care"

Parents frequently feel that the school believes they are indifferent or unconcerned--that "If you cared, s/he wouldn't behave that way." No parents would choose for their child to be unsuccessful or disobedient or disrespectful. Sometimes a few parents may throw up their hands with a difficult child, or be unable to deal with the situation or want to run away from it, but they all care. Such parents need to be assured that the school knows full well that they are concerned and appreciates their desire to help improve the situation.

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"Let's plan."

When we seek to enlist parents as highly valued colleagues to join in a mutual effort to increase their child's success at school, most of them (not all; a perfect record is seldom achieved in any profession) become willing collaborators. Usually parents who avoid working with the school do so because they feel they will be "put down," thought of as inadequate, or lectured at. More than one parent has in effect declared, "I'm never going to another conference; I'm sick of being told I'm a bad mother." And when challenged by "Is that what the principal told you?" the typical response is "No, but that's what he meant."

In any case, those four messages--"S/he can, but doesn't. You care, let's plan."--should become the structure around which every disciplinary communication is built.

The most welcome of the four, and thus the two that are most likely to lead to collaborative relationships, are "S/he can" and "You care."

One of them should therefore be the first idea communicated by the letter. It would be really unusual that parents would discredit a message that begins with an affirmation of their child's adequacy (and thus their own).

The communication should end with the invitation to work together--"Let's plan." A definite time should be proposed for a meeting, with the alternative, "If this time is not possible for you, please telephone tomorrow morning so that we may arrange to get together as soon as possible."

Notice that the principal (or teacher) does not ask, "Will you please meet with us?" because the school does not intend to take "No" for an answer. The school truly wants to form a partnership in this venture and will not easily be turned aside.

Following are some sample letters. Note the introduction of the four key components: "S/he can, but doesn't. You care, let's plan," and observe how the letter is careful to dignify the student: "She doesn't realize. . .," for example, rather than asserting that she is "bad."

Dear _____,

Tom has shown us what good thinking he can do. He figures out very difficult problems and can support his answers.

This makes it all the more puzzling that he doesn't finish work we know he can do. As a result, we are worried that he may get behind in his studies.

We know your family really values education and plans for Tom to attend college.

So that together we can make sure he is well prepared, please meet with us at school on _____ to identify ways we can work together to assure that Tom's work matches his intellectual ability.

Should that time not be possible for you, please telephone first thing tomorrow morning so we may set a meeting time as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Notice we are "puzzled"; we do not speak of his "problem." We say he "may get behind," not that he is so laggard that the case is becoming hopeless.

Dear _____,

We continue to be grateful for the time and ideas you have contributed to our school safety committee. Largely as a result of your input, our students are safer at school and more careful on the way to and from school.

We know that you want John to follow safety rules, and at school he does so very well. On the bus, however, he and his friends have so much fun together that safety gets forgotten.

Please talk to John about this matter so that he learns from you as well as from us that rules must be obeyed if he is to continue to ride the bus.

Thank you very much for your help. I feel sure we can soon let you know that he is doing just as good a job on the bus as he is at school.

Sincerely,

Notice the words are "continue to ride," not "kicked off of the bus," and that he and his friends are "having fun" not that he is a brat. We also make the commitment to let the parent know that the collaboration was successful.

Consider how you would feel as a parent if you received a letter such as the following:

Dear _____,

Mary is constantly getting the other girls into trouble because they do whatever she tells them.

You need to come to school on _____ so we can straighten out this problem.

Sincerely,

Your feelings probably would be different if, instead, you received the following:

Dear _____,

Mary has a great deal of leadership ability and the girls follow her willingly. When she helps them become more productive, everybody admires her.

When one is learning to be a leader, it is tempting to use that power, so Mary sometimes leads others in ways that may not work out well for them.

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We know that you, as we, want Mary to lead others in a way that we'll all be proud of her. Please come to school on _____ to help us enable Mary to see the difference between productive and destructive leadership.

Sincerely,

Notice that Mary is a "beginning" leader who is "tempted," not that she is a "bad girl."

The vocabulary used in such letters may need to be adjusted for parent understanding. The same message can be given to less verbally sophisticated parents by something like the following.

Dear _____,

The girls all respect and admire Mary, and they want to be like her. As a result, she needs to be careful that what she does sets a good example for others.

Sometimes Mary encourages girls to do things that you and we would not think are best, so we need to meet with you on _____ to plan ways to help Mary see the difference between helpful things and those that are hurtful to others.

Sincerely,

After any meeting with parents, the principal has an obligation to set a time when they will be informed about "how things worked out"; so that they are aware that the situation has been resolved and that their contribution was importantly responsible. If the plan is not effective, at least you both know what will work and as collaborators can proceed from there to make new plans.

Working together, home and school can constitute a potent team as the focus on the common goal of making students successful.

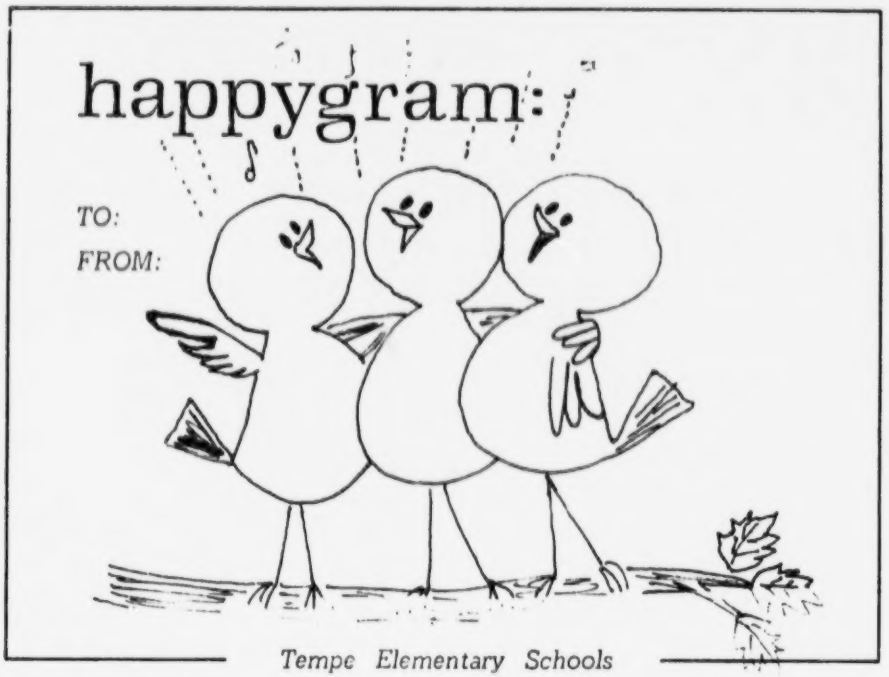
That's not likely to happen, however, unless parents are approached in ways that make them feel appreciated and valued and welcome.

(Hunter, 1986)

Copies may be purchased from the National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1615 Duke Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314. Single copy: member price $1.50; non-member price $2.50. Virginia Residents add 4% sales tax. **Payment must accompany order.**

Happy Grams or Good-News Notes

A happygram or good-news notes are excellent ways to tell parents about the positive things their children are doing. A sample is shown below.



Notes

Another method of communication is the practice of using notes, which would be brief comments about happenings and events at the school. The material could be brief, informal little antidotes such as: "Blake told a beautiful story today about her recent trip"; "Ollie gave an excellent report on magnets"; "Blake organizes her thoughts and speaks clearly"; and "Ollie certainly seems to know a great deal about magnets." These are examples of news notes that create good will between parents and schools.

This concept of informal notes may be extended into classroom newsletters which could include actual samples of children's work. Imagine the proud grandparents when they see a beautiful picture or an original poem created by their grandchild and reproduced in the classroom newsletter! Public relations will be at an all-time high when these kinds of things start occurring in the area of communication with parents.

The most important principle to remember is that communications be frequent, positive, and constructive. Teachers who develop expertise in the broad avenue of communication can bring significant benefits to themselves, the parents, the school, and the child.

(Autrey, 1984)

Teacher-gram

Parents need to know how their children are doing in school. A weekly teacher-gram is one way of informing parents of students' study habits and behavior. A simple card that teachers can fill in, will go far to strengthen teacher/parent cooperation.

TEACHER-GRAM

Name _____

Week of _____

Study Habits _____

Behavior _____

Your child's teacher _____

NOTE: Encourage parents to communicate with you by providing space on the bottom half of your teacher-gram.

(Carney, 1984)

Group Communications

Information Packets

A packet of materials detailing school services and including meeting dates, important names and telephone numbers, school policies, necessary supplies, and other pertinent information are developed and personally delivered to the parents of first-time students by parent volunteers. Experience has shown that by reaching out to parents and making a positive first impression many of the problems caused by faulty information and miscommunication are eliminated. In addition, do not overlook the positive impact this activity can have on parent volunteers. Parents serving as school ambassadors feel good about making a positive contribution to the school.

Monthly Calendar

Mailed each month from the principal's office, the one-page calendar highlights upcoming school and community events, plus makes daily suggestions for parents to follow in interacting with their children. "Have your child identify the different shapes in your kitchen," "Write a poem with your child," "Read a story to your child and have him predict how it will end," and "Have your child tell you about something happy today" are examples of daily calendar entries. Posted on the refrigerator door, the calendar serves as a daily reminder that the school does care about the quality of the parent-child relationship.

(Beale, 1985)

Newsletters

The newsletter is a general-purpose means of communication. Studies show that a quality newsletter is the single most effective way of reaching parents whose children attend an individual school building. It feels very personal to hear from "my child's school."

The evidence shows that a large majority of parents read and act upon information provided in newsletters. They are upset if news of school events comes too late. One helpful principle in preparing the newsletter is to emphasize upcoming events with a brief but comprehensive calendar on the cover page. The more informative the newsletter, the more positive its reception. News development should be brief and pointed. Personal messages and viewpoints from school personnel are welcomed.

(Gotts, 1984)

Newsletters may also be produced by each grade level or department. The newsletter contains specific information about the learning program and is written by the students.

PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION

Planning Worksheet

1. List some areas of concern or problems that your school has relative to parent-teacher communication.

2. Select one of the items listed under no. 1 and brainstorm for possible solutions. List your ideas below.

3. Now select one of your ideas from the brainstorming (no. 2) and develop a step-by-step plan to implement the idea.

Action Steps	Who Will Do It?	When?	Evidence Completed?
a.			
b.			
c.			
d.			

(Use back of page if necessary.)

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SECTION III

Parent-Teacher Conferences

PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

Introduction

Schools are relying more and more on conferences between teachers and parents as a means of communicating about the child's progress. Teachers need the help of the parents to do the best possible job of educating the child. Through conferences the parent can supply information about the child that could be very useful to the teacher. In turn, the teacher can offer suggestions to parents on how they can help the child learn at home. During such conferences, parents and teacher can discuss the child's progress, behavior, and reasons behind successes and failures.

Parent-teacher conferences should occur regularly, whether or not the child is having problems. Parents and teachers have a common goal--to help the child learn--and both play an important role in the child's development.

A parent-teacher conference gives parents a chance to:

- o get to know their child's teacher or teachers;
- o learn about the school and curriculum; and
- o discuss their child's strengths and weaknesses in various areas.

And teachers will learn things from parents that will help them improve the child's educational program!

Types of Parent-Teacher Conferences

There are two types of parent-teacher conferences:

- o Group
- o Individual

The Group Conference

Schools often plan a general open house for parents early in the school year. It is an opportunity for them to meet their child's teacher and the other parents and to learn about the plans for the school year, the school's policies, and the teacher's standards and expectations. It is a time to ask general questions rather than to discuss the specific problems of a particular child. Parents should feel free to ask questions about what will be taught and the methods to be used. Some questions parents may wish to have answered are:

- o What are the children studying this year?

- o What are they doing in specific subject areas? What do you include in social studies? What kind of mathematics will they learn? How do you teach reading or spelling? What do children in the early grades learn from cutting and pasting?

- o I see equipment with which I am unfamiliar (computers, overhead projectors, etc.). How is it used and what is it used for?

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- How is the class organized? When are children taught in groups rather than as a class? What do you do for the child who learns faster or slower than the others?

- How do you evaluate the child's progress? What tests are used? What do your grades mean?

- What policies apply to this grade? What are the school rules? How much homework do you give? What kind of discipline is used?

The principal or a teacher may start the conference by speaking briefly to the group, sharing information of interest to all. Then, there's time to meet and talk with teachers and other parents, and perhaps tour the school building. The group conference is a "get acquainted" session for parents and teachers.

In many schools the group conference is used as a time for parents to sign up for individual conferences.

Please keep in mind that the group conference is not the time to discuss an individual child. There's plenty of time for that at the individual conference.

The Individual Conferences

In many schools, each teacher schedules a conference with each child's parents as routine procedure, regardless of whether the child is having extraordinary problems. The individual conference provides a chance for the parent and the teacher to discuss the progress and potential of the child. Some of the topics which the parent and teacher may discuss are:

- the child's overall ability to do school work
- how well the child is doing in reading, math, or other subjects
- samples of the child's work
- special interests or abilities the child is showing
- books and other materials being used in the classroom
- how well the child gets along with classmates
- child's behavior in and out of class.

The teacher, too, will have some questions. He/She is not trying to pry into the parents' personal life, but only to obtain information that will help her or him work better with the child.

(Let's Have a Conference, n.d.; A Parent-Teacher Conference, 1978.)

Preparing for the Conference

What the Teacher Needs to Do

A. Examine your attitudes and feelings toward conferences.

School procedures affect family life, as the home conditions affect school life. Parental support helps to increase learning and make teaching more effective. Feelings form the basis of relationships--teacher-parent-child. Recognize your own true feelings regarding parents in general. What are good parents? Do you want them to visit your class? How do you feel about their criticizing or offering suggestions? Do they offer and/or accept suggestions and criticisms? These cannot be assessed in one or two meetings. The child's feelings are important also--how does he feel about himself? Does he view his parents as "good"? Does he like to have his parents visit the school? How does he like school activities?

Improve relationships in the following ways: (1) Assume parent cooperation; (2) Think of learning as cooperative; (3) Think of parents as people; (4) Seek for real reasons; (5) Be willing to tell; (6) Keep on telling; (7) Use the resources available; (8) Use the common denominators; (9) Invite suggestions; (10) Ask for help; (11) Recognize individual differences; and (12) Live up to expectations.

(Guidelines for Improving Parent-Teacher Conferences, n.d.)

B. Contact the parent to arrange for the conference.

The arrangements may be done by either telephone or letter. Usually, there is less possibility of miscommunication relative to day and time if the arrangements are confirmed by letter.

Parents will come to conferences if they believe the conference will meet their needs. Consider sending the letter on the next page in advance of the conference. It was carefully designed to address the concerns of parents . . . and to have an action orientation.

If parent-teacher conferences are to be well attended, they should be held at times when parents can come to school without too much inconvenience. Because more and more children come from families with working parents schools are rapidly changing the hours they set aside for conferences. Many now schedule time before school (or the parent's job) starts and in the evening and on Saturdays. Some districts supply a substitute for the teacher who has a heavy schedule of conferences outside "normal" working hours. And, the new scheduling techniques have resulted in an increased number of fathers attending the meetings.

("The Parent-Teacher Conference," n.d.)

C. Arrange a place for the conference.

The parent-teacher conference should be held in a location where you can have private, uninterrupted conversation with the parents. Parents and teachers should be seated on the same level, preferably away from the teacher's desk. Arrange for comfortable seating, with good lighting and ventilation.

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D. Think through what you plan to cover in the conference.

The areas or topics you plan to cover should be written down. What do you hope to accomplish? What do you need to communicate? What do you want to communicate? What steps can you follow during the conference to assure that you meet your major objectives? For example, what questions will you ask, what points will you make, what suggestions will you offer? What materials will you share with the parents? Are they organized in a sequence that will complement your conference plan?

How will you wind up the conference? What specific steps, if any, will you recommend? In what ways can the parents work with you to improve their child's education?

(Banach, 1982)

You will also want to obtain information from the parent about the child. A sample list of questions is on page ____.

E. Collect any materials you may need.

You will want to have available samples of the student's work, records of grades, copies of curriculum and instructional materials, and test results.

F. Prepare the child for the conference.

The child should know that the purpose of the conference is to help him/her. Talk over conferences with your pupils several days ahead of time. You may want to hold conferences with your pupils during the week after the parent conference. Discuss the child's strong points as well as things that need improving.

(Moore, n.d.)

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Dear Parents:

You will be contacted in a few days to arrange our parent-teacher conference. Each of us sees your child in different situations and can gain new awareness of his/her needs, strengths, and limitations by sharing our observations. This sharing process may reveal ways in which we can cooperate to the benefit of your child.

I have circled some questions for you to answer for our next conference. You will also find a list of questions parents often wish to discuss with their child's teacher. Please read the list and choose three to five questions that you would like me to answer. Place the numbers of your choices on the bottom of this form and return the form to me by next Monday. I am looking forward to our cooperative efforts to make this a productive year for your child.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Jane Doe
Fourth Grade Teacher

PARENT QUESTIONS TO TEACHER

After choosing from the list those questions you would like me to answer, please circle them and place their corresponding number on the lines below. You may keep the list of circled questions as your record.

#_____ #_____ #_____ #_____ #_____

_____
Parent Signature

(Strom, 1982)

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TEACHER QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

1. What types of activities take up your child's leisure time when alone? With peers? Adults?
2. What activities do you and your child especially enjoy doing together?
3. How does your child act when you identify a mistake or a weakness the child needs to work on?
4. What methods of discipline do you use with your child?
5. What kinds of chores does your child have at home?
6. How does your child handle the chores you assign?
7. What kind of a place is available for your child to study without interruption?
8. How do you feel about the homework your child is expected to do?
9. How does your child react to your helping with homework?
10. How often do you and your child read together?
11. How often does your child play and work alone?
12. How do you reinforce good behavior at home?
13. What things at school tend to upset your child?
14. What aspects of school does your child consider the most difficult?
15. What television programs do you and your child watch together?
16. What observations can you share about your child's relationship with peers?
17. How does your child act when angry? Frustrated? Doing well?
18. How much sleep does your child usually get each night?
19. What does your child have to say about his progress in school?
20. In what ways is your child not meeting your expectations?
21. In what ways is your child working up to your expectations?
22. In your child's opinion, what would make life at school more interesting?
23. What does your child like most about school?
24. Are there any attitudes you hope your child will be able to change?
25. Is your child able to persist with tasks for a long time?

(Strom, 1982)

PARENT QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

1. Is my child doing as well as he/she should in school?
2. Is my child working up to his/her ability?
3. Is my child performing at, above, or below grade level in reading and mathematics?
4. Do you group children for reading and math? If so, what group is my child in? How are children selected for each group?
5. What are my child's strengths and weaknesses in major subject areas?
6. What tests will my child take this year? What is the purpose of the tests? How will the test be used? What do you take into account when deciding grades?
7. Does my child need special help in any subject? Is such help available?
8. What will my child be learning this year in math? In reading?
9. How can I participate in developing an instructional plan for my child? How can I support my child's instructional plan at home?
10. Are there regular homework assignments? How much time should be spent on homework?
11. What schedule does my child have during the school day?
12. Does my child get along with other children? With you?
13. Does my child respect the rights and property of others?
14. Does my child show any behavior, such as squinting, being tired or irritable, that may be signs of a medical or emotional problem?
15. What are the discipline procedures in the classroom?
16. Are there any discipline problems with my child?
17. What suggestions do you have for us that would help our child?

(Source Unknown, n.d.)

What the Parent Needs to Do

A wise school district also helps parents prepare for the parent-teacher conference, too, for an unprepared parent can make the conference almost as unproductive as can an uninformed teacher.

Through newsletters, PTA meetings, features in local newspapers and even TV and radio programs, some school districts emphasize this point, and help parents prepare for a truly productive parent-teacher meeting. These tips for parents are a compilation of ideas from the National School Public Relations Association:

When preparing for the conference with your child's teacher:

- Make a list of things you want to tell the teacher about your child so that the teacher can understand the child better--his health, attitudes toward school, family relationships, hobbies and interests, etc.

- Make a list of things you want to find out from the teacher. For example, services and programs the school offers, discipline policies, grading policies, extracurricular activities, daily schedule, homework policy, health and safety programs. (On page 37, is a list of parent questions for teachers you may wish to review.)

- Decide what you want to ask the teacher. Discuss the conference with your child to see if there is anything he/she would like you to talk about with the teacher. Check with your spouse and decide which aspects of your child's schoolwork are puzzling or worrying you. Ideally, both parents should attend the conference. Do you have any gripes or complaints? Now is the time to get all the facts about a school situation you may only know about secondhand.

- Do not bring the child with you unless requested. Also, do not bring brothers and sisters. Check to see if the school provides babysitting services during conference time.

- Be on time. Write down the time of your appointment and arrive promptly. The teacher may have other appointments after yours. It is especially helpful if both parents can attend. If your schedule is difficult, check with the school about arranging a special time for your conference. If you feel you need more time, ask about setting up an additional conference.

("The Parent-Teacher Conference," n.d.)

During the Conference

Suggestions for Teachers

Give waiting parents folders of their children's work to look at. It will make waiting easier, and give them a chance to bone up for the discussion that is to come. Keep appointments on schedule.

Opening the conference:

1. Begin the conference with some sort of friendly attempt at general conversation unrelated to the child. This can establish rapport. Comments such as, "Johnny says there's a new baby in the house," can help relax the parent.

2. Always start a conference on a positive note stressing some good points about the student. Emphasize the child's strengths, assets, and positive accomplishments.

3. Describe performance as precisely as possible in terms you are sure the parent will understand.

4. Never present too many negative concerns to the parents. It may be defeating.

Involving the parents in the discussion:

5. Encourage the parents to talk and then listen for both facts and possible emotional feelings expressed, and make an attempt to separate the two.

6. Ask questions to find out why a parent appears to have a concern about the child's behavior and/or school work. A parent can frequently gain insights into his own, or the child's, problems and/or concerns if the right questions are asked.

7. Realize that most behavior is the result of a variety of causative factors. If a parent thinks he can give a reason for his child's behavior, accept it, and then lead the discussion on a consideration of other possible causes.

8. Accept the comments of the parent. Show no surprise or disapproval of information he shares in order to gain insight into his attitudes and feelings. Don't panic if the parent becomes upset.

   Accept the parent as he is. Be aware of special sensitivity noted in him.

9. Provide time for parents to ask questions about homework, grading, special programs, discipline, etc. Allow parents to interrupt or disagree with your comments.

10. Be friendly and relaxed and allow sufficient time for discussion.

11. Try to gain insight into the parents' attitude toward their child, the school, and you.

12. Avoid arguing with parents, for this will create resentment and resistance. When it is desirable to change a parent's point of view, be as diplomatic as possible.

13. Avoid imposing your own opinions. Let insight on the part of the parent evolve through discussion into possible reasons for poor behavior or achievement.

Considering solutions:

14. Try to get parents to take the initiative in describing what approaches are being used at home to help the child. It is always possible to suggest other activities that may approach more closely the causes of the difficulty.

15. Suggest alternative approaches for joint consideration in dealing with a child's problem. This makes the parent a participator in developing tentative plans and may lead to a discussion that will help him adopt a plan of his own.

16. Make a limited number of suggestions for improvement. Do not guarantee parents that your suggestions will work. Just let them know that these suggestions have helped in some cases. Establish a timeline with parents for these solutions.

Concluding the conference:

17. End the conference by discussing next steps to be considered.

18. Plans which are to be followed should be worked out together. If at all possible, use the parent's plan of action. Never argue or be dictatorial. Keep at parent's level in the discussion and avoid using technical educational terms.

19. Ask for the parent's help and cooperation in effectively educating the child. Don't accept the full responsibility for the child's education. Help the parents see their parental obligation for a share of the success or failure.

20. Summarize what has been said during the conference. (Tell parents again what you have already told them.) End with a friendly thanks to the parents. Tell them it is nice to work with parents who are concerned about their child.

21. Document conference for future reference.

22. Be sure to follow up conference with a phone call or second conference. This shows commitment on your part.

Additional suggestions for successful conferences:

23. Put yourself in the place of the child and the parent and attempt to determine what effect your remarks will have on them.

24. Treat information as confidential unless other individuals are physically endangered.

25. Avoid any disparaging remarks about earlier teaching of the child.

26. Keep other children out of the discussion in order to concentrate on the individual child.

27. Do not answer questions that parents ask regarding administrative decisions unless the policy is clear, concise, and you are sure your interpretation is correct. Otherwise refer the parent to the administrator.

28. Remember you represent the school. The impression you make may be seen as that of the school.

29. Understand your own strengths and limitations. Utilize the services of pupil service personnel who may be able to help you and the parent understand the child.

30. Remember, the goal of the conference is to help the child. This requires mutual cooperation between parents and teachers.

(Adapted from "Guidelines for Improving Parent-Teacher Conferences," n.d.; "Twenty Guidelines for Parent Conferences," n.d.)

Fingertip Checklist for a Good Conference

1. Make careful preparation.
2. Ensure privacy.
3. Provide an informal setting.
4. Set a time limit.
5. Establish rapport.
6. Begin on a positive note.
7. Encourage the parents to talk.
8. Listen attentively.
9. Develop an attitude of mutual cooperation.
10. Delay making numerous definite suggestions.
11. Encourage suggestions from parents.
12. Summarize points covered.
13. Make plans together for future progress.
14. End on a note of continuing cooperation.
15. Make notes after parents leave.
16. Be informed about the school's philosophy.

(Moore, n.d.)

Watch Your Language

Parents send to school their most precious possession--their child(ren). Sensitive? Yes. Therefore, there are expressions to be avoided because they leave false or undesired impressions. Here are some expressions which may have unnecessarily negative implications, and more positive phrases which might be substituted.

Negative Expressions	**More Positive Expressions**
Lazy	Can do more when he/she tries
Troublemaker	Disturbs the class
Uncooperative	Should learn to work with others
Stupid	Can do better work with help
Never does the right thing	Can learn to do the right thing
Impertinent	Discourteous
Stubborn	Insists on having his own way
Liar	Does not always tell the truth
Sloppy	Could do neater work
Failed	Failed to meet requirements
Mean	Has difficulty getting along with others
Poor grade of work	Working below his/her standard
Selfish	Seldom shares with others
Show-off	Tries to get attention
Will fail, unless	Has a chance of passing, if. . . .
Rude	Inconsiderate of others

(Moore, n.d.)

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Suggestions for Parents

Be at ease; the teacher is just as interested in the well-being of your child as you are. Do not hesitate to ask questions, such as:

- What is my child's ability level? Is he/she working up to his/her ability?
- What group is he/she in? Why?
- How is my child doing in mathematics, reading, science, etc.? May I see some work samples?
- What books is he/she using?
- Has he/she shown any special interests or abilities?
- Does he/she get along well with classmates? Participate in group activities? Shown any leadership qualities?
- Are there discipline problems?

The teacher may have some questions for you about your child, such as:

- What is your child's reaction to school?
- How is after-school time spent? What are his/her hobbies or special interests?
- How and where is homework done?
- What is your child's response to rules and responsibilities at home?
- What type of discipline works best at home?

(The Parent-Teacher Conference, n.d.)

The teacher will tell you:

- Your child's test results, and what they mean;
- What subjects your child is taking and how he/she is doing;
- Your child's strengths and weaknesses in school; and
- Any observations that can be helpful (whether the child may have trouble hearing or seeing, etc.);

And, the teacher may have some suggestions or ideas you can use at home to help your child in school.

You can help by giving the teacher any information that will be helpful to understanding your child better. For example:

- Important experiences that may be affecting your child (death in the family, a best friend moving away, etc.);
- Special medical or emotional needs;
- Conflict among family members.

In fact, anything that could be affecting your child. It is not necessary to reveal personal information, however, anything you do say will be kept in confidence.

Ask the teacher how you can help at home with any problem areas. Jot down notes at the conference or immediately after. Toward the end of the conference, review with the teacher some of the action points you've discussed that might help your child do better. This might include such things as possible remedial work, improved study habits, revised goals, more understanding, outside reading, more credit being given for strengths, etc.

(A Parent-Teacher Conference, 1978.)

After the Conference

Teacher Procedures

After the initial conference with parent(s) follow up with a phone call or written note to express appreciation and to report progress of student in at least five school days. If the conference ended on a negative note, another contact, in a few days may find the parent more receptive to constructive dialogue. Remember, remain friendly and interested in the child.

Keeping a record of the conference and its results may prove very useful in the future. A form could be developed for uniform usage. A card with space for additional conferences or a sheet to record each conference may be utilized.

An agreement such as the one on the following page may be helpful in obtaining a commitment to continue to work together.

(Guidelines for Improving Parent-Teacher Conferences, n.d.)

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STUDENT-PARENT-TEACHER AGREEMENT

We know that learning can take place only when there is a combination of effort, interest, and motivation. Because we are all committed to _____'s progress in school, we are going to do our best to promote his/her achievement.

This agreement is a promise to work together. We believe that this agreement can be fulfilled by our team effort. Together we can improve teaching and learning.

As a student I agree to:

- Work as hard as I can on my school assignments.
- Attend school every day unless I am sick.
- Follow the Code of Student Conduct.
- Ask my teacher questions when I do not understand something.
- Go to my public or school library at least once a week.

As a parent I agree to:

- Talk to my child about his/her school activities every day.
- Find out how my child is progressing by attending conferences with the teacher whenever needed.
- Limit my child's TV viewing and help select worthwhile programs.
- Encourage good study habits at home.
- Reinforce the Code of Student Conduct.

As a teacher I agree to:

- Provide motivating and interesting learning experiences in my classroom.
- Explain my grading system.
- Give feedback to the student about his/her progress.
- Find out what techniques and materials work best for the student.
- Explain the Code of Student Conduct to the student and his/her parents.

Most importantly, we promise to help each other carry out this agreement.

_____ (Student Signature)

_____ (Parent Signature)

_____ (Teacher Signature)

Signed on this ___ day of _____, 19___ at

_____
(Name of School)

(Operation Fail-Safe, 1979)

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ARE YOU A TEACHER WHO . . .

a = always; b = sometimes; c = never; NA = not applicable

a	b	c	
			1. never admits to a parent that you are wrong?
			2. has a sense of humor in a conference?
			3. lets parents smoke in a conference (if allowable under rules of the facility)?
			4. serves coffee or soft drinks to parents during a conference?
			5. favors certain students?
			6. shows expression and emotions during a conference?
			7. starts conferences on time?
			8. has conferences in parents' homes?
			9. compares students with their older siblings?
			10. finds it hard to say "I don't know" to parents?
			11. talks less than 50% of each conference?
			12. talks about your own problems and solutions in conferences?
			13. sits behind a desk during conferences?
			14. enjoys parent conferences?
			15. has examples of children's work to show parents?
			16. has had a principal sit in on one of your conferences?
			17. finds yourself criticizing more than praising your parents?
			18. feels that parents have lost the respect of their children?
			19. feels that parents have lost control of their children?
			20. finds yourself physically drained at the end of a series of conferences?
			21. prefers to have conferences with fathers rather than mothers?
			22. studies a child's folder and past achievements before a conference?
			23. argues with parents?

a	b	c	
			24. feels intimidated by parents?
			25. demonstrates to parents effective ways to work with their child?
			26. likes to problem-solve with parents?
			27. involves parents in planning for their child?
			28. encourages parents to visit class during sessions?
			29. does not want parents to teach their own children?
			30. is honest with parents?
			31. listens to parents?
			32. dreads conference time?
			33. prepares handbooks or handouts for parents?
			34. has good attendance at conference time?

(Source unknown, n.d.)

After the conference, ask yourself these questions:

- Was I prepared?
- Did I have an informal setting and ensure privacy?
- Did I use time well?
- Did I begin on a positive note?
- Did I listen attentively?
- Did I encourage parents to talk and offer suggestions?
- Did I plan with--not for--the parents?
- Did I learn anything new that will help me teach the child?
- Was I well enough informed about what is happening in my school?
- If the conference could be repeated, what would I do differently?

(Banach, 1982.)

Parent Procedures

If you forget about the conference when you leave the school, it is not likely to have any positive results. The most important part of your role in the conference begins now.

- Discuss the conference with your child. First, point out strengths. Then talk about the areas that need improvement. Talk about any changes or new plans. Try to be positive! The better your child feels about him/herself, the better he/she will do in school.

- Start immediately on any action you have decided to take. Did the teacher recommend books for you or your child to read? Did she or he suggest a better arrangement for studying at home? Did he/she propose getting outside help in a special area? Begin at once to follow through with the plan you and the teacher decided upon.

- Feel free to call the school if you wish to check on your child's progress or if you think another conference is needed. Teachers generally value such interest on the part of parents.

- Make certain your child understands that you and the teacher are working together in his/her interest. The child should know that you and the teacher are in partnership, with the sole aim of helping him/her get the best education possible.

(The Parent-Teacher Conference, n.d.)

Summary

1. Realize what an important role you play in the education of your child.

2. Understand the need for a close partnership between parents and teacher to help your child get the best education.

3. Take an interest and try to understand the goals of both child and the school.

4. Give praise for success and try to help overcome failures--based on the strengths and weaknesses of the individual child.

5. Keep in close touch with your child's teachers--feel free to call them and ask for conferences.

(Wherry, n.d.)

Evaluating the Conference

Parent-Teacher conferences should be evaluated to obtain information on any problems that may have occurred, and how they might be improved. The evaluation may be a simple three-part questionnaire asking, "Did the conference accomplish what you had hoped? What was the most helpful part of the conference? What would you like to see done differently next time to improve the conference?"

An example of a more detailed evaluation form is shown below:

Dear Parent:

In order to determine how much information you received and how useful the conference was, it is necessary to have some written feedback from you. Please check the response that indicates your feeling about each item. It is not necessary for you to sign the feedback form. After completing the form, please leave it with the principal. Thank you.

	YES	NO	NO RESPONSE
1. I was allowed to discuss the matters which concerned me most about my child's education.			
2. My questions were answered to my satisfaction.			
3. I felt at ease during the conference.			
4. The teacher(s) was courteous and treated me with respect.			
5. I developed a plan with the teacher(s) of things I can do to maintain or improve my child's education.			
6. I think the plan is something that I can easily use with my child.			
7. I feel more positive about my child and his/her education.			
8. The conference was a positive experience.			
9. I plan to come to school again on the next conference day.			
10. Comments			

_____

_____

_____

_____

(Operation Fail-Safe, 1979.)

ROLE-PLAY SITUATIONS

The following role-play situations are designed to give practice in handling parent-teacher conferences. It is suggested that the participants work in groups of three. One person plays the role of the teacher; another the parent; and the third is an observer. At the end of each role-play the observer gives feedback to the other participants on how well the conference was handled. The participants should change roles until each person has an opportunity to play all three: parent, teacher, and observer.

Parent-Teacher Conference No. 1

Teacher: Ms. Abbott is a first-year teacher, experiencing her first parent-teacher conference. She is teaching fifth grade and so far has not met any parents of her students. The first conference is with Mrs. Burns, the mother of Billy, who has been a real discipline problem. Billy does not pay attention, bothers other students, and will not do his work. Ms. Abbott suspects discipline is lax at home. Also, she heard last year's teacher had problems with Billy, too.

Ms. Abbott is seated at the teacher's desk and has drawn up a student's desk for the parent.

Parent: Mrs. Burns is somewhat nervous about this conference, too. She is aware that Billy is a difficult child to manage, but his previous teachers seemed to handle him. In recent months he has become more aggressive and obstinate. She suspects that he has not been receiving adequate discipline at school. She feels he needs a more experienced teacher.

Parent-Teacher Conference No. 2

Teacher: Mr. Wilson, sixth grade teacher, has been selected to be one of the teachers in the school to experimentally use some new science materials recently published by the XYZ Book Company. He is very proud to have been selected for this study, and hopes to receive some national recognition for his participation.

Since he is so busy, he has scheduled parent-teacher conferences during the lunch hour. That way, he can supervise some of the students who remain in the room to work on projects while talking with the parent. All parents had been requested to be prompt, and he gets right "down to business" as soon as the parent arrives. He informs Mrs. Turner that her daughter, Betty, is doing quite well in most areas except science. She seems to be having difficulty in relating to the new material. He hurries through the conference to get rid of the parent as rapidly as possible.

Parent: Mrs. Turner arrives promptly at the time designated to find she would not have the privacy she was hoping for in discussing her daughter's situation. Her daughter had been experiencing some emotional difficulties due to a family crisis. She wanted a chance to discuss this with Mr. Wilson. Betty seems to be having trouble with the new science materials. Mrs. Turner is not sure she wants her involved in an experimental study. Before she could

ask any of her questions, another parent appeared in the doorway and she had to leave.

Parent-Teacher Conference No. 3

Teacher: Ms. Garcia requested that Ms. Peterson arrive after the students had left for the day so they could talk without interruption. She had compiled a folder containing samples of Danny's work from each of his classes, his achievement test scores, and other information. She placed a couple of chairs by the table on which she had laid the folder. Ms. Garcia recalls that Danny does quite well in nearly all areas, but he is very quiet and rarely makes a voluntary contribution in class.

She greets Ms. Peterson at the door, and invites her to sit at the table. She tells her that Danny talks about his mother's painting and suggests that she bring some to show the class. As they review Danny's papers, she makes some specific suggestions on how to help Danny, and listens to Ms. Peterson's ideas.

Parent: Ms. Peterson is concerned that Danny's attitude toward school is somewhat negative, and that his school work may have suffered. She is pleased with the talent revealed in language arts, and leaves the conference feeling satisfied and with several ideas on what to do to help Danny.

DEALING WITH WILD-EYED MOTHERS, MALEVOLENT FATHERS, AND OTHER INTERESTING FOLKS

Inspite of our best efforts to communicate with parents, occasionally someone will become very upset, and confront the teacher or principal with a great deal of anger and hostility. Dr. John Erickson offers these suggestions for handling this situation.

First, keep in mind the following principles.

The world is true as we perceive it.

The information the angry parents have convinces them that a great wrong has occurred to their children. Their perceptions must be altered before agreement can be reached.

Irate parents believe they are battling for their kids.

They believe they are defending their children against injustice.

There is <u>always</u> the possibility that the school staff erred in some way.

School personnel are only human and mistakes do occur. Try to get as many of the facts as possible before deciding the parents are wrong.

You are not confronting "Snipers," but "Sherman Tanks," or Exploders."

Rather than "bad mouthing" the school in the community these parents will confront you face-to-face. They may become very loud and attempt to intimidate you.

Possible steps you might take to deal with the situation are listed below:

1. Introduce yourself by name and title.

   "I am Ms. Johnson, Principal of this school".

2. Get the antagonists to introduce themselves.

   Be sure to get the names of everyone present. Involve all parties in the conversation. Ask questions and seek comments from everyone.

3. Shake hands.

   This to reduce the level of anger, and set a more cordial tone.

4. Sit down.

   It is much more difficult to be belligerent or threatening in a sitting position.

5. Take notes.

   People feel you are really listening to them if you take notes.

6. Use your communication skills.

   Look the person directly in the eye. Nod your head to indicate you are actively listening. Check perceptions with comments such as, "I hear you saying that. . ." Paraphrase with statements such as, "You stated that. . .," or describe behavior with, "It appears that this situation is very frustrating to you".

7. Speak carefully, patiently, softly.

   Even though the person is shouting at you, remain calm and do not raise your voice. Try to speak slowly, clearly and in low tones.

8. "Move In"

   Lean forward, use arms and hands to take up some "neutral' space. This makes you appear more in control, more intimidating.

9. Question: "What Do You Want to Have Happen"?

   Many times the antagonists have not thought about what they want to have happen to resolve the situation—they are just "mad". This question indicates you are willing to consider their point of view, and seek a solution.

10. Try for middle ground.

    Probably you are going to have to give up something. Try to get them to meet you halfway.

11. Do not take strong stand on weak issues.

    Know what your are willing to give up. If an issue is relatively unimportant to you or to the school, concede the point.

12. Make no promises you cannot keep personally.

    Avoid saying you will have the teacher or the principal do something. You cannot guarantee they will.

13. Make a commitment to call or to write.

    "I will call you tomorrow to give you my decision."

14. Thank parents for sharing their concern.

    At least, they care about their children's education and are willing to come to the school to do something about it.

15. Act because of what you have learned.

    Talk to all parties involved, get all sides of the situation. Then, do something about it.

16. Report as you promised.

    Call or write the parents with your findings and decision as soon as possible. (Erickson, 1985)

APPENDIX

REACHING THE HARD-TO-REACH PARENT

The following suggestions were collected through "brainstorming sessions" with representatives of disinterested/alienated parents, single parents, and limited-English speaking parents. School administrators and teachers are urged to use these ideas as a starting point for improving communication with parents.

Disinterested/Alienated Parents

The concerns relative to their children's school achievement of this group of parents are that:

- their children do not create any behavior problems at school. Their major emphasis is not on grades.
- the parents feel that they have nothing to contribute. They leave the responsibility for teaching entirely to the school.
- some teachers in the upper grades seem to discourage the parents from coming to school.
- they hear only negatives about their children when they do come to school.
- they do not know what to expect of the child at each grade level.
- they may feel inadequate to teach the child.
- they are scared of teachers; afraid they will seem like fools.
- they do not feel welcomed when they do come to school.

Communication with the disinterested/alienated parent can be improved by:

- developing networks of parents with children in the same class or grade.
- involving their children in a program such as art, music, drama. Hold the program early in the evening so they may bring all their children.
- having home visits by the school staff for people who don't come to school.
- giving the parents positive "strokes" when they do come to school.
- arranging meetings of parents and teachers around social events such as potlucks and picnics.
- using the power of the media.
- setting up booths of information about the school in shopping malls.
- having a program for each grade level with the child participating. Distribute the information which parents can use to help their children learn.

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The school can encourage the disinterested/alienated parent to work with their children by:

- o telling the parents it is "O.K." for them to teach their child. Some parents may need "permission" to do so.
- o giving parents ideas on what they can do to help their children. On home visits, show parents ways they can held their child learn.
- o finding ways parents can help their child learn basic skills as they go about their regular routines.
- o encouraging parents to listen to their children.
- o having information in a compact way - so it can be stuck on a refrigerator, bulletin board, or door.
- o talking with parents about how to help their child watch TV, how to evaluate what they see.
- o continuing home visits in the upper elementary grades. Let parents know what is happening at school.

Limited-English Speaking Parents

Concerns of limited-English speaking parents relative to their children's school achievement are that:

- o the child may not understand what the teacher is saying.
- o the teacher may not realize it takes longer for the child to learn because the child doesn't understand the language.
- o the child will ask the teacher for help when he/she doesn't understand.
- o the teacher may not understand what the child is saying.
- o the teacher has a positive attitude toward bilingual students.
- o the teacher is willing to communicate with the parent if the child is having problems.
- o the child feels comfortable with the teacher.
- o the teacher is willing to make more than one explanation to the child, and give enough time to help the child understand.
- o the teacher knows alternatives or sources of help to assist the child.
- o the teachers really care about the students at the high school, as well as elementary level.

Communication with limited-English speaking parents can be improved by:

- o holding meeting or conferences with parents.
- o having a translator available for limited-English speaking parents.

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- sending information home written in the language of the parents.
- having the parents volunteer in the classroom.
- putting progress reports in a language the parents can understand.
- communicating with the parents if there is a problem with the child.
- trying to solve problems, rather than ignoring them.
- having someone to answer the school telephone who speaks the language of the limited-English speaking parents.
- administrators recognizing parents visiting the school and making them feel welcome.

Limited-English speaking parents can be assisted in helping their children learn by:

- having available books and other materials which the parents can borrow.
- letting the parents know what is being taught and the method the teacher is using.
- having workshops for parents on how they can help their children learn.
- sending home explanations and forms to help the child with homework.
- praising and recognizing all children when they do well.

Single Parents

The concerns of single parents relative to their child's school achievements are:

- lack of time to spend with the child as result of trying to fill several roles.
- not having another adult with which to discuss ideas and/or problems.
- the level of discipline in the classroom. Is there a learning atmosphere? Does the school reinforce the moral values of the home and church?
- the teacher's awareness and sympathetic understanding of the child's problems at home before and after the divorce.

School personnel can improve communication with single parents by:

- reaching them through single parent group meetings, church groups for Singles, Parents Without Partners, Big Brothers, and Big Sisters.
- holding parent-teacher conferences in the evenings. Have on-going explanation of school programs in the cafetorium at the same time. Serve refreshments.
- having a place on school registration forms or health cards to indicate if the parent has a different last name than the child. This is needed to get in touch with the parent in case of illness or injury.

- finding ways to keep the noncustodial parent informed relative to the child's school activities and progress.
- distributing information to senior citizens to pass on to their children who may be single parents.
- developing flyers to place on bulletin boards in business and industry for employees.
- telephoning the parent periodically to inform him/her of the child's progress.
- notifying the parent when the child was disciplined, and what action was taken so parents reinforce the action or follow up on it.

The schools can assist single parents in helping their children learn by:

- developing a brief audiovisual presentation of parents helping their children learn to be shown at PTA meetings, parent-teacher conferences, and school programs.
- working with the community's large employers to conduct workshops during lunch for employees on helping children learn.
- using a cartoon idea - recipe book approach in materials for parents.
- having workshops for parents on time management skills.
- training a parent to visit homes or conduct meetings with parents on how to help children learn. Provide babysitting services for parent meetings.
- helping parents to understand they are teachers of their children too.
- providing rewards which parents can give to their children for mastery of skills.
- informing parents right away when the child is having difficulty in a subject area - before the report cards come out.
- conducting training seminars for parents on helping their children learn.
- scheduling parent-teacher conferences in the evening or before the normal workday begins.

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